VOLUNTEER 2000

Report to the

Honourable Neil J. LeBlanc

from the

Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee

Province of Nova Scotia

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1990 the Government of Nova Scotia activated a government commitment outlined in the Throne Speech of February 1989 "to devise a realistic, strategic action plan for the future of Nova Scotia's volunteer movement."

The Minister Responsible for the Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission was assigned the responsibility of fulfilling this commitment.

The Minister invited people from across Nova Scotia to sit on a Steering Committee, entitled **Volunteer 2000**, to develop and recommend to the provincial government a plan to help build and support a dynamic volunteer sector.

Many of the Committee members are active and experienced community planners and volunteers. All members brought to the discussion, skills and knowledge valuable to developing a dynamic plan for volunteerism in Nova Scotia into the next century.

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee was:

Chair: Gerry Clark, Bedford
President
Metro United Way

Michael Arthur, Halifax
Director, Community Recreation
Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission

Marsha Andrews, Halifax
Coordinator Publications/Promotions
Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission

Shirley Chernin, Glace Bay
President
Citizens Service League

Betty Gruchy, Truro
Children's Aid Society and Family Services of Colchester County

Anna Keay, Halifax
President
Nova Scotia Cancer Society

Colin MacEwan, Halifax
Administrative Assistant
Senior Citizens Secretariat

Fergie MacKay, Trenton
Municipal Councilor

Ray MacNeil, Dartmouth
Research Officer
Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission

Frank McNamara, Sydney
Cape Breton Regional Representative
Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission

Brigitte Neumann, Halifax
Director
Nova Scotia Women's Directorate

Valerie White, Bedford
Coordinator
Senior Citizens Secretariat

With assistance from:

Cecil Wright, Halifax
Betty D'Eon, West Pubnico
Helen Desmond, Halifax
Elizabeth Mills, Halifax
Recreation Resource Centre of Nova Scotia, Wolfville

The Volunteer 2000 group met for the first time in September 1990, reviewed its mandate and began the development of a work plan to complete its task. The Steering Committee adopted the following as a goal for its operation;

> *The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee is a cross section of volunteers and resource people invited by the Government of Nova Scotia to facilitate the identification of issues and priorities of volunteers in Nova Scotia and to utilize this information to develop a strategic action plan for presentation to the government of Nova Scotia in addressing the future of volunteerism in Nova Scotia."*

For the purposes of its activities the Steering Committee developed and adopted as a **Definition of Volunteerism**:

> *"The spirit of community demonstrated by those who, without pay and of their own free will, actively contribute their time, talent and resources with resulting benefit and enrichment of the community."*

Originally outlined in the Throne Speech of 1989 was a provincial conference to help generate a long-term plan for volunteerism. In consultation with the government, the Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee developed and implemented an alternate process for involving the voluntary sector and the public in development of the longer term strategy.

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee believed that in order to develop a valuable strategic plan for volunteerism in Nova Scotia it required information which reflected:

- a profile of volunteers and volunteer organizations;
- a scope of volunteer activities;
- a sense of the challenges and issues facing volunteers;
- visions for volunteerism in the future.

The Committee felt it important to provide an opportunity for volunteers and the organizations which they represent to meet with committee members and discuss face-to-face their needs, problems, successes, frustrations and, importantly, their dreams for Nova Scotia's volunteers in the 21st century.

As a result, the Committee's work plan called for:

- a survey of volunteers in Nova Scotia;
- a survey of volunteer organizations in Nova Scotia;
- a survey of provincial government departments and agencies in relation to volunteerism;
- a series of public discussions with volunteers and volunteer organizations throughout the province.

Each of these tasks was undertaken and completed in 1991.

The information gathered, the issues identified and the recommendations and suggestions made during each of these phases served as the benchmark data, and became important to the Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee in the development of the recommendations presented in this report.

A PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS IN NOVA SCOTIA

The information gathered during the Volunteer 2000 initiative is consistent with other literature and reports and provides insight into who in Nova Scotia is volunteering time and energy without pay for community events, services and activities.

Some pertinent characteristics of Nova Scotia volunteers:

- Among volunteers there is relatively even distribution in the age range from 35 to 75,
- 65 percent of Nova Scotia's volunteers are female,
- 33 percent of volunteers are employed,
- 35 percent are retired,
- the household income for 50 percent of Nova Scotia's volunteers is more than $40,000 a year,
- 64 percent of volunteers have a post-secondary diploma/certificate or a university degree,
- 71 percent of volunteers in Nova Scotia devote a minimum of four years to volunteer service. Volunteers who work with an organization for four years or more are considered to have a strong commitment to that organization.
- 72 percent indicate that they volunteer for more than one organization or effort.

Overall, volunteers feel their work is "enjoyable", "important", "satisfying", "stimulating", "worthwhile" and "necessary".

For the most part volunteers view the most significant personal reward of their efforts as the sense of accomplishment derived from helping someone or some cause and contributing to the community.

ISSUES AND TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERISM

Throughout the Volunteer 2000 process volunteers, volunteer organizations and provincial government departments/agencies articulated many issues of concern regarding volunteerism in Nova Scotia.

The Steering Committee reviewed the issues in the context of the trends which are expected to influence volunteerism in the decade ahead.

Volunteer Recruitment and Support

By far the most pressing needs of volunteers and volunteer organizations in Nova Scotia are those involving the leadership, management, training, recruitment and recognition of volunteers.

Throughout the province Nova Scotians in the voluntary sector describe an increasing need for appropriate and accessible programs and services to help in the recruitment and placement, training and motivation of volunteers.

Presenters at the public discussions expressed a need to develop and maintain quality leaders in volunteer groups and organizations.

They express fear that "burn-out" is depleting existing volunteer ranks and that recruitment will become more challenging in future.

There is general consensus that a formal program promoting the personal and community benefits and advantages of volunteering is necessary. An element of this general awareness program would be to encourage and motivate new volunteers, for instance more young people, seniors and those without current employment.

There is also a prevalent recognition that the business of recruiting volunteers must take into consideration the changing lifestyles, needs and time commitments of contemporary Nova Scotians. It was also felt that care should be taken to "match" a willing volunteer to an appropriate volunteer task.

Administrative Services

Volunteers province-wide report a growing need for administrative services, resources and systems to support volunteer activities. Basic needs such as meeting space and access to typing, photocopying, mailing services and telephones were described as critical to ensuring that volunteer organizations continue to function effectively. Such services would help to ensure that volunteers feel rewarded and satisfied that their efforts are used to best advantage in pursuit of the volunteer organizations principal goals.

There is also an expressed need for more and improved communication among groups and organizations.

As lifestyles of Nova Scotians change, it is increasingly important to ensure that volunteer energy is invested in meeting objectives and providing service and is not unnecessarily diverted to administration and maintenance of an organization itself.

Provincial Government Funding

Contributors to the Volunteer 2000 initiative reinforced the need for continued financial support from the provincial government for volunteer organizations.

Importantly, government departments and agencies were asked to make funding guidelines clear and to allocate resources to the most critical of needs.

There exists in Nova Scotia a perception among volunteers and organizations that the provincial government is divesting itself of some of its responsibilities and subsequent programs and services in the expectation that the needs will be fulfilled by the voluntary sector.

Although indicating a willingness to cooperate with government, volunteers and organizations express a wish to be consulted before government backs away from these responsibilities.

Volunteers also feel that some financial support and resources should be offered volunteers and organizations who agree to assume new responsibilities.

Cost of Volunteering

Concern was repeatedly expressed for what was referred to as the out-of-pocket and transportation costs associated with volunteering. There is a perception that volunteering time increasingly costs money and that this cost factor has become a barrier to recruiting potential volunteers especially those from lower incomes, the unemployed, seniors on fixed incomes and young people and students.

Presenters to Volunteer 2000 suggested that perhaps some tax incentives could be initiated by the provincial government in order to off-set some of the perceived cost deterrents associated with volunteering.

Promotion

Participants in the Volunteer 2000 process repeatedly called for a renewed acknowledgement of the value of volunteerism and volunteer effort in the public and private sectors.

There is a strong feeling among volunteers and volunteer organizations that a promotional program to heighten public awareness of the opportunities and advantages inherent in volunteering would serve as an important building block in volunteer recruitment, management and satisfaction. It was suggested that in such a program the service of informal, as well as formal, volunteers be acknowledged and that young people, unemployed people and senior citizens be targeted to dedicate time, effort and experience to volunteer service.

Although volunteers find motivating, personal rewards in their volunteer work, volunteers felt that an expanded and a better coordinated program of formal recognition for volunteer efforts would be an important tool to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention.

In several instances the need was expressed for a stronger communication network among volunteers and organizations. Presenters felt that improved cooperation, collaboration and communication among groups would prove advantageous to volunteers and to building dynamic volunteerism in Nova Scotia.

Organizational Effectiveness

The need for basic administrative services and centralized information was cited as an important element in the effectiveness of organizations. Access to volunteer training services, to the techniques which contribute to the management of volunteers and to leadership training were cited as areas which need improvement and which contribute to overall effectiveness.

Also there is a pervasive recognition that planning, establishing priorities and operational assessment is increasingly important for volunteer organizations to work to maximum benefit.

Sound planning and a process of evaluation and assessment are identified as important elements in recruiting quality volunteers.

Need for such services was clearly identified by volunteers and groups.

Employer Support

Participants in Volunteer 2000 expressed the opinion that both the public and the private sectors benefit from volunteerism and should be encouraged to contribute to the voluntary sector. It was suggested that, as well as dedicating money, business, labour and government should continue to "donate" staff time, skills and resources to the activities and projects of volunteer organizations.

Specifically, it was felt that as an employer the provincial government should "lead by example" and actively encourage volunteerism among its employees.

Legal Liability

Confusion and a lack of information regarding the legal liability of volunteering frequently influences and hinders the ability of organizations and individual volunteers to work most effectively. The liability issue was frequently raised.

The Challenge

Although the issues are contemporary, **volunteerism remains an important and powerful tradition in Nova Scotia.**

For hundreds of years Nova Scotians have dedicated their time and energy to caring for each other and sharing personal skills and resources in support of their neighbours. Mobilizing volunteers has been the method by which communities have developed and progressed in this province.

Whether volunteering is the formal commitment of time and energy to an identified organization or cause or an informal, spontaneous sharing of effort, volunteering is a way of life in Nova Scotia.

Research gathered for the Volunteer 2000 report indicates that a selfless sense of community remains strong in Nova Scotia volunteers today.

The challenge therefore is to ensure that appropriate resources and energy are dedicated to encourage contemporary Nova Scotians to increasingly commit more time to volunteer efforts. It is important that the volunteer time is used to best advantage for the benefit of the community and the satisfaction of the volunteer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Values

As an important financial and resource contributor to volunteer agencies and organizations in Nova Scotia, the provincial government has a fundamental and influential role to play in volunteerism and its future.

There was consensus throughout the discussions surrounding Volunteer 2000, that *the provincial government will positively affect the development of volunteerism when it embraces clear values and helps to establish a network of support and growth for volunteers.*

The provincial government in all its relationships with volunteers and volunteer organizations should accept basic principles;

-- that there exists in Nova Scotia an identifiable,active and autonomous voluntary sector, independent of government and the private sectors, and yet interdependent with them.

-- that individual volunteers and volunteer organizations collaborate as partners with government in contributing to the quality of life in Nova Scotia and that this contribution is invaluable.

-- that volunteering, tangibly and intangibly, benefits the community at large as well as the individual who volunteers, and is often instrumental in the growth and development of communities.

-- that self-sufficiency of volunteer organizations deserves encouragement and support.

-- that government deal fairly, reasonably and openly with all volunteers and volunteer organizations seeking assistance.

-- that government support efficiency and the maximization of resources in the voluntary sector.

-- that government consult consistently and effectively with the voluntary sector, in the development of government policies and programs.

Recommendation 2: Collaboration

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee views the provincial government's role in the development and encouragement of volunteerism as that of a catalyst working in partnership with a self-directed and self-sufficient voluntary sector to encourage and support a climate conducive to a strong, effective and autonomous voluntary sector.

Recognizing the value of volunteerism, it's recommended the provincial government work in collaboration with the voluntary sector to provide resources and to support an infrastructure required to establish an environment which promotes, nurtures and supports a dynamic and effective volunteer base.

The resources volunteers require now and in future include funding, research, information, administrative services, leadership and training resources and the communications resources associated with the promotion of volunteerism and recognition of volunteer service.

Recommendation 3: Criteria for Funding

There is a fundamental and critical requirement for government to develop fair and reasonable criteria for funding of volunteer groups and organizations. Inherent in this recommendation is the obligation for government to develop criteria based upon the values it holds in relation to volunteerism.

Government is responsible to clearly communicate the criteria for funding to the voluntary sector and to respond as promptly as possible to requests for funding, resources and support.

Recommendation 4: Clear Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities

Due to the fact that many different departments and agencies of government deal in different ways with hundreds of volunteer-based organizations, there is confusion among volunteers as to the role of government in relation to volunteerism.

To eliminate this confusion government should clearly delineate its role in the delivery of services, and define the ways in which the voluntary sector can complement and contribute to providing these services.

Such a delineation of roles should be outlined in consultation with the voluntary sector. Such consultation would also work toward minimizing the fear of volunteers that they could unexpectedly be left to deliver services currently delivered by government.

Recommendation 5: Coordinating Mechanism Within Government

As a method of effectively working in cooperation with the voluntary sector the provincial government should identify a coordinating mechanism within its existing structure to consistently and cohesively address issues affecting volunteers and volunteer effort.

A Minister should be assigned direct responsibility for volunteerism. The coordinating group would report to the Minister and on the Minister's behalf become a "gateway" to government for volunteers, volunteer organizations and advocates of volunteers.

This coordinating body would act on behalf of the provincial government in the development of volunteerism.

The coordinating group would work to fulfill the provincial government commitment in areas such as volunteer recruitment, training, leadership, management and in the promotion of volunteerism and recognition of service and effort.

Recommendation 6: Research on Legal Liability

Liability of volunteers and volunteer organizations was clearly identified as an issue of grave concern and confusion for organizations. Recommendations regarding this complex issue of liability is beyond the scope of the Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee.

The issue of liability deserves indepth and skilled analysis. Such assessment is recommended for the provincial government by the Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee.

Recommendation 7: Research on Tax Incentives

In addressing the issue of the personal out-of-pocket cost of volunteering, presenters in several instances suggested tax incentives as a method of offsetting costs.

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee recommends the provincial government investigate the potential for tax incentives as a tool in supporting and promoting volunteerism.

Recommendation 8: Coordination and Collaboration of Volunteer Organizations and services.

Government should facilitate a forum where the voluntary sector is challenged to generate a council of organizations to address the common issues of volunteerism and help meet the resource needs of volunteers.

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee is confident that the voluntary sector will respond positively to an opportunity to develop and organize an advocacy and action group for volunteer development.

Recommendation 9: Circulation of Volunteer 2000 Report

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee recommends that government distribute this report and make it available throughout Nova Scotia.

CALL TO ACTION FOR VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Government cannot be expected to independently meet the needs of volunteers and address the issues effecting volunteers. Indeed, volunteers have stated clearly that they wish government to consult and work with them and are willing, even anxious, to cooperate and collaborate as a partner with government in meeting community and individual needs in Nova Scotia.

As government should identify a lead Minister to whom the voluntary sector can address itself, it is equally important that the voluntary sector organize a council of volunteer organizations with whom government can work in partnership.

To be effective and influential in the development of volunteerism a council of volunteer organizations should be provincial in scope and accessible on a regional basis.

A council of volunteer organizations should serve as the "voice" of volunteerism in discussion, consultation and advocacy with the provincial government. It should become an influential partner with government initiatives and services requiring the input and cooperation of the voluntary sector.

A council could also serve as an important resource, instrumental in providing to volunteer organizations recruitment, training, leadership and management materials and assisting with administrative and assessment needs of groups.

It could serve in an advocacy role to government and the private, and non-government sectors to promote volunteerism and its benefits.

The council could serve as an important segment of the infrastructure established to support volunteerism. The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee envisions that government would be a partner along with the voluntary sector in funding a council of volunteer organizations.

CONCLUSION

In spite of, and perhaps because of, the pressures and challenges facing contemporary volunteers and organizations in Nova Scotia, they maintain a strong, traditional commitment to volunteering and to the communities they serve.

Virtually all acknowledge that change in the way in which organizations are operated, funded and assisted, in which volunteers are recruited and managed, and in the level of operation among counterparts and partners, is inevitable and progressive.

Volunteers ask to be considered a fundamental part of the process of change.

The Volunteer 2000 Steering Committee is confident that an open working relationship among volunteers and between volunteers and the provincial government is a solid foundation upon which to build a dynamic voluntary sector into the year 2000.